

Working in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project
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Tigran Arakelyan
Conductor, Seattle

Interviewee: Tigran Arakelyan

Interviewers: Angie Kong

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TIGRAN ARAKELYAN 00:00:15: You don't ask me tough questions.

ANGIE KONG 00:00:17: I won't (*laughs*). Well, maybe—we'll see. Okay, so the reason for conducting this interview is to collect personal stories of how COVID has affected those in the field of music. You don't have to share anything if you don't feel comfortable with it. Alright. Angie Kong is interviewing Tigran Arakelyan. Today is Thursday, June 11, 2020, and I am in Seattle, Washington. Where are you?

TIGRAN 00:00:48: I'm in Lynnwood, Washington.

ANGIE 00:00:49: Oh, you're in Lynnwood. Okay. This is on Zoom. To get started, can you tell me a little bit about your job?

TIGRAN 00:00:63: Okay, well, I conduct. I conduct orchestras. I work with two youth orchestras. One of them, you played in, actually— Bainbridge Youth Orchestra and Federal Way Youth Orchestra and also conduct the Port Townsend Symphony, which is an adult orchestra. In the summers, I work with California Philharmonic, which is based in LA, and also Northwest Mahler Festival, which is based in

Seattle, and also just guest conducting as much as I can. Something that I don't get paid for, but I enjoy a lot, especially recently with the situation, is my podcast. I get to talk to some amazing world class musicians and just talk about just regular life and music and how they do stuff. So it's—that's what I do—mostly conduct and try to make a career out of it. But it's really tough with the situation now.

ANGIE 00:01:55: Where did you get your professional training or formal education?

TIGRAN 00:02:00: Well, the last place I went to is somewhere you're going to now—is University of Washington. A couple of years ago—well, 2013 I was—I was—2012/13. I was thinking of doing a doctorate. I was working with the Los Angeles Youth Orchestra at the time, and I was thinking of doing a doctorate, but I didn't know if I wanted to leave LA because my family's there, my parents, my brother. Also because I was starting to get some conducting stuff there. And I really also wanted to do a doctorate. So I applied to a couple of places and something surprising happened. I got an email from Ludovic Morlot, who used to conduct the Seattle Symphony, and he said, "Hey, I heard great things about you. We're—I'm starting this program." It was, I think, his first year as the director of the conducting program there, and he said, "I heard good things about you. Do you want to come and send me your resume and stuff, and maybe we can have you in the program." So I did send everything he wanted, and a couple of days later, I get a call from him. He says, "Hey, I really like your stuff. We'll give you a full ride. Come study with us at University of Washington." So I did my doctorate at the University of Washington and my master's at California State University, Northridge, which is sort of my hometown. Well, LA is my hometown. So, that's, that's where I got most of my other training.

ANGIE 00:03:22: Nice. I didn't know that Morlot had asked you to come. That's pretty cool. So before COVID happened, what did a day to day or weekly schedule look like for you?

TIGRAN 00:03:38: Well, weekly schedule is really all over the place. As musicians—as you know, we have to—you know, practice our thing—our art form. And things that I worked on—every week, I would split it into things—into two sections, really, of things that I like to work on. One section is stuff that I'm working on now. And no matter how easy the piece is I still try to study it and know it the best that I can. And the second pile, as some of my mentors have always told me—Ludovic and actually David Rahbee and Victor Venner, who I studied with when I was in LA, he's the conductor of California Philharmonic—they all told me to—to always—because you might get really busy—and last summer was one of the craziest summers of my life—you might get really busy, and it's good to try to study as much of the standard repertoire as you can. So I would always have a pile of, you know, standard orchestral pieces that most orchestras play every year to study those and be prepared for those. And last year, a couple of instances like that—I—in my mind, I thank them for doing that for me, because I was asked to step in and do some things with various orchestras as a guest conductor. A couple of those pieces I actually had worked on throughout the years and those moments really reminded me: you should always have kind of a pile of things that you work on that are standard because you might be called on and then you have to jump in and do it. And you want to start at a place

where you actually are a little bit familiar with the piece instead of being surprised with a piece that you don't know or something that you just haven't practiced enough or worked on.

Especially when you work with a professional orchestra, they are really—they're ready for anything. They've done it—you know, they've done it a million times, so you have to know that piece so well that when you step up and they play it perfectly, you still have something to say, you don't just say, "Oh, that was great. Now let's move on." You know the piece so well, that you're really carefully listening. So you're listening to the—when I conducted at the Walt Disney Hall, for example, we were conducting Mozart 40 and the crazy—the crazy thing is, that Hall is really weird and the winds and—and the way the orchestra was set up—the winds were really—I couldn't hear them too well. So just knowing the piece so well that you're not just focused on the score but you're able to listen to everything that's happening around you and you could really see what you can improve on—because no matter how great an orchestra is, even if it's the Berlin Philharmonic, they have something to improve on. Every orchestra does. Especially with something that they haven't played maybe. But with Mozart, obviously, they've played a million times, but they still have something to improve on. And even if they don't technical things, you as a musician—it's not just about the notes. It's beyond the notes.

So you could do stylistic things, you could do your own interpretation of the piece. Everything, especially in Mozart and Bach—in those eras, it's not about just the notes. People—music was so much a part of their life that they—simple things, you know, crescendos and other things weren't really written in all the time. But people had to—it was so much a part of their life, people just did it. Now it's not, and it's okay, because people listen to pop, they listen to all these other genres, which is great, I listen to those too, but we have to be able to step up on the on the podium and be able to tell the orchestra, "Let's do it this way here. Maybe we could do this a little bit differently." And then there's balancing issues. There's just so many things. So I don't even know where the question was—what question you asked, but it's good to have those two piles. I think we were talking about the music. It's good to have those two sections where you could think about some things you're working on now and some things that you're passionate about and you could work on in the future, or work on now so you could conduct in the future or play in the future.

ANGIE 00:07:33: With—and you've been having to have a lot more time to get deeper into your studying of works of music?

TIGRAN 00:07:45: Yeah. Honestly, sort of, because I've kind of kept that about the same. Since I'm not driving around, actually having to be in rehearsals—I told you, I'm doing this podcasting, which has been super fun. But yeah, it's a—it's a—it's—as musicians, as soon as you stop learning, it's—it's a bad place to be. I mean, some of the greatest musicians, they practice all the time. Actually, someone was recently on my podcast, and I asked him if he still practiced as much. He's like, "No, I practice smarter now. I don't practice six hours a day. I don't need to. I practice like, one hour a day or two hours a day, but it's dense. And I don't—He's like, "when I was younger, I would, you know, always think about

other things. I'll be like, okay, you know, there was that —baseball article—let me let me read that a little bit and then I'll go back to practicing or something like that." He's like, "Now, when I'm in the room, I'm just practicing. And I always tell my students—now it's not the baseball article or other things, it's a phone. So, when I'm practicing—what I tell my students—don't practice six hours and look at your phone half the time or look at your computer and message your friends. Put that away. Do one hour, just intense. Be in the moment and just dedicate yourself to that thing, and then step away and be on your phone or other things that you're doing." It's really—it's a really cool perspective because I tried to do that and it's still kind of difficult for me because I'm like, "Oh, I want to practice and I'm doing this," but then something distracts you. You get a message, you're—you want to get on the phone. So I've been trying to put my phone away actually, recently when I do stuff but it's difficult. In this—in this world, it's really difficult and I can't blame students or other people who are doing that. It's tough.

ANGIE 00:09:30: Do you feel like the distractions are more present these days than before?

TIGRAN 00:09:36: Yeah. For me—actually, we talked a little bit before we got on this record—My son is—in the positive way, the biggest distraction because I'm working on stuff and he wakes up from a nap or something. I'm like, "Okay, I'm putting everything away. Don't even worry about it." And I go a couple—I just want to spend a lot of time with him. So that's been the biggest distraction. And honestly, I'll say this: before, with music it was a phone or other—computer that would distract me, or some kind of an event. I like to watch—following sports. But now it's—it's none of those things. It's just him. It's really cool. To be honest, even—even before the pandemic, and everything that happened, I—I started, you know, I stopped watching sports as much as I used to. I don't watch too much—too much too much TV. So, because I want to spend as much time with him as possible.

ANGIE 00:10:35: I guess that makes sense, because that world has also been on pause, too. So before COVID what were—what were your [inaudible] _____ thoughts?

TIGRAN 00:10:48: You did ask me this, yeah. Before COVID. So my—so I would—I talked about the scores. I didn't talk about anything else. With—depending on the week—the week was standard—I mean, standard in some ways, but every day I had something—something different with some other orchestra. Rehearsals every week were between 4:00 and 9:00, for example. Some orchestras are between 4:00 and 7:00. Other orchestras are between 7:00 and 10:00. On Tuesdays, for example, I would—it was a long drive, but this is my biggest commute. On Tuesdays, I would go to Port Townsend to rehearse with the orchestra and then I'd have to take a ferry, get there and then rehearse and then come back. I had Federal Way Youth Orchestra that I worked with. That was actually the easiest one because it was just a drive down, and I didn't have to go other places. But last year, I was also working in Bremerton. That's another thing where I had to take a ferry, go to the other side, and do that. Bainbridge I still have to take a ferry and do that whole routine. But my mornings, I actually—my mornings have always been relatively free, outside of meetings. But all these orchestras, as you might know, especially the adult orchestras—I think with youth orchestras, it's a little bit more straightforward, but with adult

orchestras, they have meetings, they have planning committees, they have repertoire committee—you have all these different meetings that are happening.

My week—the one thing I love about conducting and not having a standard schedule, especially some of my friends who are teaching at a couple of community colleges in LA and universities, is that theirs is a little bit more standard. They have their weekly thing and they always go to the same place. With me, it's a different place each time. It's great, but it's not great for the mileage. You just drive [?much?]. Recently actually, speaking about commute, I don't even listen to music or podcasts anymore when I drive. So it's kind of nice. I mean, my wife, for example, she thinks I'm kind of crazy. She's like, "What the—you're driving all that way and you don't listen to anything?" I just kind of put the window down just a little bit, and I just drive in silence. She's like, "You're crazy. I don't know—I don't know who does that." But just conducting a music a lot and also just listening to a lot of music to prepare for things and also listening to a lot of music at home that's not classical music, other genres, I—I just want to sometimes just have that time to be away from all the different music and just be in silence or just listen to the road. That kind of—just the—schedule-wise, it's all over the place really, depending on the—depending on the week.

ANGIE 00:13:29: Do you see listening to music as more of work sometimes rather than an enjoyment?

TIGRAN 00:13:37: Yeah, it is. Yes, I do do that. But now, again, going back to my son—I feel like I'm talking about him a lot, but with my son, it's—I try to introduce him to all the different things that I've enjoyed listening to: jazz or rock or pop or anything. And classical. I feel like it kind of helps me listen to other genres that sometimes I didn't listen to, because I'm so busy with classical music stuff, but I've always enjoyed different genres. So (pauses) yeah, so I don't know. My parents—actually, my parents were very—they listened to all kinds of different genres, so I kind of—I grew up just listening to all the different genres. To be honest, probably—they might not like that I'm saying this if they ever hear this, but probably classical music was the least that we listened to at home with my parents. It was all different pop and rock and all kinds of different other things. My dad really liked Rock. We listened to all kinds of different genres.

ANGIE 00:14:43: Do you have a favorite genre?

TIGRAN 00:14:46: Outside of classical music, since I'm in classical music, I would—if I was to make a general statement, it would probably be jazz.

ANGIE 00:14:55: Nice. And how old is your son right now?

TIGRAN 00:14:59: He's nine months.

ANGIE 00:15:00: Nine months. Oh, wow. Already.

TIGRAN 00:15:03: Time flies.

ANGIE 00:15:04: Yeah it does. Then—before COVID happened, or in the process of everything changing—what were your thoughts about that?

TIGRAN 00:15:19: Well, about COVID? My thoughts—It's tough. I mean, as artists—I mean, it's tough for everyone on this planet because, somehow people were affected. Even—when people think about big corporations, they don't care about those, but there are so many people who are doing minimum wage jobs working for those big corporations, and then they lose money. In LA, I have so many family members and friends who work for different—from private to corporate businesses, and they all were affected by it. There's just so much loss and, as a musician, as an artist, it's really tough to think about this and it's really scary because sometimes arts are looked at, as the—the thing that doesn't matter. It's of least importance to people, because when you think about music, and people are, you know—when you think about a pandemic, and people are dying, and there's just so much loss and people don't have jobs, all these different things—music—of course it's important, but at the same time, if we're going to invest money in something, it's probably—music and arts in general might be the last thing we worry about when trying to save lives and do all these other things.

It's really tough. It's really scary. I hope—I hope that there's some kind of a solution for this, and I hope that arts can survive. I first—first of all, I just hope that there's no more people—people don't die from this thing, and somehow the great scientists and doctors—they can come up with something that will save more lives in this process, because 100,000 lives are lost just in the US, from what I understand. It's just very depressing. I didn't listen to the news as much and that's something my wife noticed. But as soon as this started, I caught myself listening to the news every day, just consistently, and I'm not a big news person. I don't--try not to follow it. It's really depressing sometimes, especially with current events happening, with pandemic and everything else that's happening in the world, with Black lives and everything. It's a really devastating time for the world. It's—it's—hopefully art survives, if we're talking specific to the arts, but I don't know. New York Philharmonic just canceled their first half of their season, Seattle Opera canceled their first half their season. And when you think about these, so many people rely on their jobs to take care of their family and their kids. So it's—it's a tough time. It's really a tough time and to think about—again, bringing my son back into talking about this—thinking about his future and how he's going to live in this society, and this planet, and how things are happening, and it's—it's very worrisome.

I—I hope that we can get better as individuals, and also help our communities get better, because so many people talk about changing the world and doing all these things. It starts with yourself. You change yourself, and then you help your community, you serve your community, you're helpful and caring towards each person in your community, or even in your neighborhood in your community. And it just goes that way. It keeps changing. Some of the greatest people who have changed the world and

brought these great ideas—they started with very small places, with their homes. They changed—they change their perspective, and their outlook, and their vision for themselves and for their society. Then they help their community. Start serving your community and helping them in many ways that you can in any way that you can. No help is too small. Sometimes people think, "Oh, this sixteen-year-old, he or she can't do something." Well, that's not true, because every person is able to do something and all of us contribute together to make the society and the world a better place. Because—Because it's never about one person. All of us have to do it. Imagine if everyone just said "Oh well, let the other people do that." That doesn't work that way, because if we all just rely on other people to do stuff, nothing will happen on this planet. Everyone has to be able to contribute to their small communities and then eventually, hopefully, make it a bigger—make a bigger impact as a society, as a whole. Sorry if I'm not answering your questions, you could ask it again, if I didn't.

ANGIE 00:19:23: No worries. Well then, you talked about unemployment. Well, if it was in the music world or music industry, do you have any thoughts about the unemployment and how that—how they—how bigger organizations can take care of their employees?

TIGRAN 00:20:06: That's really tough. I mean, even bigger organizations, like if it's Seattle Opera, that is a massive organization— multimillion dollar or New York Philharmonic—even they are struggling because they have all these people to pay for and there's not much coming in. Arts relies so much on live events. With sports, I always bring this example because I think sports will survive fine. Of course, it's not the same thing when, you know, you have thousands of people cheering you on and you're playing your sport. But at the same time, sports have a different platform. They could put it on ESPN and all these other things, and people will pay for the ads that come up, or other things and they will find a way. Well, music is not even doing the live thing, because for so many years, professional orchestras have—if we're talking specifically to professional orchestras—the unions have banned from—from orchestras being recorded and then broadcasted. There's just so many problems with this. And, in some ways, it might be good for musicians to address these problems real quick and get solutions for them so things are broadcasted. Because so many musicians fear "Oh, if I mess up, people are going to see it. And then they're not going to think I'm this great, clarinet player or something."

Well, LeBron James or any of these greatest athletes—Michael Jordan and other great athletes—they've gone on. And they've had bad games, haven't they? They've had bad games. They've had games where they didn't do so well, and that's okay. But for some reason, with sports, it's okay to have bad games but with music we're so judgmental about harp player or bassoon player having a bad day playing. It's okay, it happens. You're still a great musician. It happens. Just because Tiger Woods or someone else had a bad game, that doesn't mean they're a terrible athlete. They're still a great athlete, they just--everyone has a bad day. So hopefully that will change the music and—but I don't know if I have any thoughts or any solutions about—about the—the big organizations trying to help their employees, because they're also struggling. Even on the smaller scale organizations that I've worked with—they're struggling as well. So—Some have been—I've been fortunate, some have actually paid me for not even conducting. But

others have had a hard time paying me for—for things. So that's—that's tough and you can't—you can't blame those people because they rely on things.

With youth orchestras, they rely on students paying them, so then they could pay their conductor or other staff members. With community orchestras, even more so than professional orchestras, community orchestras rely on actual live audiences, because donations are so, so big. Donations make up such a big part of community orchestras' annual operating budget. They rely on those and also, you know, professional orchestras—they rely on ticket sales, but also grants and other things. So it's tough when that's not happening. It's really tough to expect someone to pay you for something that's really not happening. So there's no solution. I don't know. I mean, I—it's tough. I've been trying to talk to a lot of people to see what they're doing. But it's really tough, you know. I am— there are two Seattle Symphony musicians who will be soloing with both my orchestras, including possibly actually with Federal Way Youth Orchestra, and both of them emailed me recently and said, "Hey, sorry, I still haven't gotten back to you about the dates. But—but—but Seattle Symphony hasn't even decided what they're doing with the first half the year." It's just tough. It's really tough. And I know some organizations are unable to pay their employees. I don't know what's gonna happen. I don't have a good answer for that. It's—it's a tough situation.

ANGIE 00:23:49: Are you, or do you have concerns about the near future for your job security?

TIGRAN 00:23:57: Yeah, of course! I'll tell you this, and I'll be really honest: In LA, I work with California Philharmonic and also Northwest Mahler festival in Seattle. But I also had another guest conducting gig that was gonna happen on Saturday. What's Saturday? The 13th. So I actually had a concert in LA. I think I even had a rehearsal today in LA. So I had a concert on June thirteenth in LA and that was canceled. That's a—that's—that's a loss, obviously, right? They're not paying me. And then my other organizations I work with during the summer regularly—they won't be able to pay me because they're really a summer organization. That's—that's a lot of loss. So it's tough trying to think about the future. It's like, it's almost—now for me and some of my colleagues who I've been talking to, it's like, you have to think about the future—what you are trying to do musically, but also think even further of—"Okay, if this thing completely falls apart, what am I going to do to support my family?"

Those thoughts are definitely running through my head, especially going into the summer with so many opportunities. So many—not just musical opportunities, but actual income that was supposed to come in that I'm not having. So that's that's really unfortunate. But one thing that's actually fortunate for me is that last summer, I had absolutely the busiest summer of my life. Musically I had so many opportunities that I was really grateful for and I had, but also, financially, I was able to make a decent amount of money where actually I'm—I'm probably going to end up using a lot of what I made last year in the summer. I was like, "Okay, I'm gonna save this and do something with it later." I'm actually gonna end up using it this summer to help my family out with that. So—and I know a lot of people are thinking about these. Fortunately, there are some grants and—I don't know what they call them, but some kind of

support for the artist or various things going around and hopefully that will benefit artists. I have to look into those myself as well. I haven't—I haven't looked into those. For me, I'm a little bit fortunate. Last summer was a busy summer for me, so I'm—I'm going to end up using what I made last summer to help my family with this summer. It's—it's a tough time. And you have to—as artists—you have to think about beyond what's happening in arts because this thing was so devastating for the arts world and the world in general that people are trying to find other things to do to support their family. It's—it's tough. There's no real answer for it, at least for that.

ANGIE 00:24:27: Then were there any other different approaches that you have tried to look into or have tried to still have those opportunities that were lost?

TIGRAN 00:27:01: Well, I'll—I'll say this: With—with the youth orchestras over the past, and a lot of kids have been responsive, but also some have not been so responsive. But with youth orchestras, for example, we did these online things where I asked them to record something, send it back to me. And then we did—oh, there was a theory assignment type of thing where I sent it to them, they have to send it back—music history component. I tried to mix it up. And these are not just my ideas. LA Youth Orchestra I was looking at, and Seattle Youth Orchestra, other youth orchestras, and seeing how they're doing various things and try to incorporate that into what I was doing as well. Various things, I kept it going like that. So my youth orchestras—they've been they've been nice and supportive with those ideas. Going forward for next year. There are a couple of things.

For example, my adult orchestra at the Port Townsend Symphony—and we usually have five concerts. This year—and we have a dress rehearsal. This year, going forward—this year, we're going to have ten concerts basically, which is twice as many but our dress rehearsals are now going to be our concerts because we can't—our hall, it's not a big hall. It's about 500 seats. But recently, it's been packed, fully packed. So to give people safety and thinking about health of people who come to our concerts, we're making the dress rehearsal as a concert experience. Because we can't pack the hall, we're only going to go like 30% or something. We still have to discuss that, but we're going to go smaller—smaller. We're not going to take as many people in the hall for our audience. We have two days to split them apart and still kind of get some kind of a donation going. And also for the musicians with the same orchestra, we're going chamber. It's usually a full orchestra, it's about 70 people, but we're going about 30 people. It's going to be strings only for the first half of the year, just to make sure that we're going, because places like New York Philharmonic and others are canceling. We're hoping that we could at least go forward with a smaller—smaller lineup of musicians and also using two days so we still get a lot of people in there between two days instead of just one so we could get some donations and support. That's what we've been doing.

With the youth orchestras, I still have to figure it out with Federal Way a bit more, but with Bainbridge Youth Orchestra, I'll probably have the same plan for Federal Way. But Bainbridge Youth Orchestra—we hope that it happens and we could go full force and have older kids there. But if it

doesn't, we're going to go into a different model where one week we're going to have half the orchestra come in one week for live rehearsals, spread out, and we could have a live rehearsal. Those kids who are not there that week—they're going to do a Zoom call with me and we're going to talk about music and pieces. I'm gonna send them a link to a couple of pieces. Then we're going to talk about music, instruments that are used and what melodies they heard, dynamics and basic things that sometimes we don't talk about in orchestra because there's no time, but we could talk about on Zoom. Then the same thing repeats next week. Those kids who were in live rehearsal—they'll be in a Zoom call with me and the kids who were on the Zoom call will be in a live session with me, spread out. So we don't have too many kids there at the same time.

One thing about the youth orchestra thing that I got from a lot of parents—quite a few called me and emailed me—is that they said that the reason why they like their kids participating in the youth orchestra is because they want them to hang out with their friends and play and experience that whole thing in the—in the moment thing. This extra thing where you know, you're sending recordings and doing theory assignments and history is just not the same thing. And I completely agree with it—with the parents. I actually—a couple of my colleagues, including LA Youth Orchestra conductor and others who I've talked to—Los Angeles children's chorus who's—that's one of the biggest youth choirs in the country, and in the world, probably. They have the same thing—is that some parents and some students just don't want to participate in these music history theory and online send-me-a-recording type of thing, because that's not what a youth orchestra is about. So we try to make things happen, but there's just limitations. Maybe someday with AI and everything that's happening with technology, maybe in 50 years or something, there'll be some kind of technology where you feel like you're—I'm sitting next to you and we're playing together or something. And you'll really feel like you're doing it in the moment, but I don't know. It doesn't exist now and hopefully maybe in the future it will. I'm not sure. I don't know if that answered your question.

ANGIE 00:31:55: That's okay. I was talking to one of my friends. She's at the San Francisco Conservatory and she's a percussionist. She actually played with Federal Way, one weekend.

TIGRAN 00:32:09: Okay, yeah, I remember now.

ANGIE 00:32:12: —and she was saying how a lot of her repertoire kind of changed. At U dub [University of Washington], there's a lot of different, more contemporary-style percussion, that's in the curriculum. But with everything going on, she was able to bring that back because usually there they focus on more orchestral and like classical sides of percussion. So she was working on pieces that really was very suitable for at home performing, like using household items. Do you see the repertoire for orchestras going in a different direction of going away from the classic classical music, or going more towards the contemporary, where it's not as sensitive to distance and listening to someone that's right next to you because of its having to be spread out? I know it will and it will change drastically. Even within orchestral repertoire, just changing it from a symphony orchestra—going from a 70

piece—playing a Mahler Symphony. They're not going to do a Mahler Symphony for a while, because that requires a big orchestra, so they're gonna do something smaller. Speaking of Mahler, actually, with my Port Townsend group, since we're going small, we actually might do Mahler, the Adagietto, from the Fifth Symphony, because it's the only strings and harp. Orchestras will definitely change and take on a new role with music and also maybe commission a lot of people, a lot of composers, and really make it for that particular time. And maybe it is a good thing because some of these orchestras, even though they're trying to commission and play new pieces, sometimes they're not doing it actively. Maybe this will give them a chance to really be active about it and say, "You know what? We really need a piece for this with one flute and six violins, two cellos or something," and ask a composer to write. Or maybe that might—that might be a good thing.

TIGRAN 00:34:25: I've always been a fan of commissioning people and playing new pieces. It might actually encourage me to do a bit more of that or look beyond the repertoire because there's so many composers even from the past that have written for smaller ensembles or different ensembles that sometimes are overlooked because, "Well, I gotta play the Beethoven symphony again. Who's that other guy I don't know about?" But this will give a chance for people to really focus and really try to program things and look for things that hasn't—hasn't been there. So I know—I know that I agree with your friend. Well— It's—this is really gonna change the music world and maybe even the orchestral repertoire world and, hopefully, it will be positive changes where it will be ongoing. It won't be like, "The pandemic is done. Forget about all those new composers."

I think—I hope that if the trend or whatever—it's not a trend—that becomes a part of our life where we're constantly thinking about new music, new composers, composers from different backgrounds, from diverse backgrounds, from all over the place. There's actually a really cool site. It's called Music by Black Composers and they listed my—couple of my episodes for my podcast on their website. That was cool. I learned about them and I—and I think it's a great resource for people to learn about music that they don't often hear in their orchestra, concert halls, and otherwise. It'll definitely change the repertoire in the world of music and bring some new new energy to it, I hope, if we're thinking about it positively. So do you think that the future of music or the orchestral setting or performative setting will be drastically different, slowly coming out of COVID into, hopefully, a future where we don't have to worry about the disease? Well, I know it will definitely impact it for the near future because when something like this happens, you're—you're going to be very careful about things. But just like with anything, when you're when you get injured or something, and you're a basketball player, you kinda take it easy or just back off and you're like, "I'm gonna be very careful. Even—even the first few games or something, I'm gonna be very careful." But as soon as you feel better, you're like, "Oh, forget about the injury. I'm gonna go full force 100 miles an hour or so."

But—I hope that everything goes back to normal and people are able to pack the concert halls, but I do hope that the changes that they make now, they're able to still incorporate those changes and new repertoire, new composers; those new ideas, the new visions of trying to do things in a different way. I

hope that they still incorporate those going forward. They're not just like, "Okay, well, everything's done let's go back." No, I hope that they keep those forward-thinking and new ideas and keep using them throughout their season, because it challenges you and gives you something new. It challenges the audience and that's—that's what music is about. Music, arts, and classical music is fun, is great, and, of course, it should be partly entertainment because people are there on a Saturday night to listen to a concert, to have a good time and enjoy. But, also, it's there and the great thing about classical music—it also gives you a bit of a challenge, something that you're like really kind of uncomfortable with. You're like, "Oh man, that new composer, I don't really like that composer, I don't even know that name. Who is that person from, I dunno, some part of the world?" [inaudible] _____ I don't even know, but it challenges you. It says, "Okay, you know what? I'm gonna find out where Tajikistan is or something, or, I'm gonna find out where Zimbabwe or Ethiopia is." And for young people who might not know or say "Oh, wow, there's actually a composer in Zimbabwe?" Yeah, of course there is. It will challenge you, and that's what classical music is about, fun and challenge. It's—it has to have both. So hopefully, orchestral music and classical music will keep that going into the future.

ANGIE 00:37:33: That's great. Another one of my friends I interviewed—he's kind of—in the kind of season of post grad and trying to get his feet on the ground, figure out what he wants to do for his future—near future, and just getting grounded in his field of music. What is your experience with the entrepreneurial or self-marketing aspect of music?

TIGRAN 00:39:14: That's—that's a tough question because I don't understand how—I have to get someone who's really capable of these online things and is better at it because I do enjoy, like I said, my podcasts and all these other things, but I'm—I mean, maybe I'm okay at it. I'm not sure, but I just don't feel like I am—I'm good at it is marketing what I do. Marketing, in the social media sense, I'm not very good. But some friends have reached out to me asking me for advice about how I present—how I—how you write a bio, and I think I'm pretty decent at that. And I have a website and some videos and all these things. I try to put that well together. It seems like it's good because, actually, a job I applied for a while ago, they came back to me and they said, "Hey, this is great. We really love what you're doing, and we also have this arts management thing. Can you help some of our artists present their bios and their website the way you have?"

So I was like, okay, that's really weird because I don't think of myself as being good at that. But I guess that—that section I feel like I'm okay. I've gotten better as far as website and bio and—and resume and other things I am able to present it pretty decently. But as far as social media, which is, I think very important in today's world, I still have to figure it out. I don't know. But at the same time, there's great artists, especially in classical music, that I get sometimes surprised about. For example, someone like my—my former teacher-mentor, Ludovic Morlot, who is this famous conductor—he's won Grammy Awards, and he's conducted one of the major symphonies in America for like ten years or eight years, and he has like 1500 Instagram followers or something. And then you look at someone who is just not doing much with their life and they have 100,000 followers or something. I don't get it. But again, it's

about what the people want to see, right? So you have to—it's tough and I have to do it. And I'll take advice from people who listen to this or even you. How do I present classical music or my—what I do in a way where it's more interesting for people who are not in that field or something? I don't know.

It's—these are things I think about, but I'm just, and I talked to other people about but I'm just not very good at it. So I don't—I don't have advice on this. But one thing I want to say is that it's great that social media is so big and important and all that stuff. But a couple of things we have to keep in mind: that these things change, and you know, people were famous on MySpace, but MySpace doesn't exist now. I was looking up—there was something like one of those online articles where it says "All ten of the most famous MySpace people that were famous and now nobody knows them." And Instagram will have the same thing and others—other things will come. But most important, do your thing. Whatever you're doing, be very good at it, try to make the connections and—and do what you're doing the best that you can, because platforms are going to change, but what you're contributing to the world—hopefully, it'll be so good that even when Instagram doesn't exist, what you're doing is still somehow important to your community and to the world. I don't know, these things change, but I need advice on that, so I'll take your advice if you ever have any for me.

ANGIE 00:43:43: I like—I like that, because I feel like the online presence is very big in—in a lot of contemporary lifestyles. Interesting perspective. Like, for example, I have to get on this TikTok thing apparently. That's happening now, right? I don't know, is that good? Are a lot of famous people on there or is it for younger audiences because I'm not on there. I think it could be for anybody. But I've seen it to be more popular with younger people. Even younger than me.

TIGRAN 00:43:24: Things change. So Instagram, one day—Facebook for a lot of people, it's still kind of big, but at the same time, I think it's kind of not—it's only for a certain age group, right? I don't know. Are you on Facebook? You probably are not. You're on Instagram.

ANGIE 00:43:45: Do you think that—that online presence for musicians and—for online musicians, performers, people in the music industry or music world—is that online presence more important right now than maybe ten years ago? Yeah, of course. Online presence is important. If you have 100 followers or 1000 followers, it doesn't matter. You have to have an online presence because, what I've noticed, especially with some people who are looking for a new conductor or a new whatever it is—instrumentalist or soloist—they really look at the online presence to see how those people are active, not just because they want to see if you have 10,000 followers, we're going to hire you. Not just that, but they also want to look into your life. This is what I've heard from other people. They want to know that you—you have a family or something or you have friends and what kind of things you're doing and also looking at your hobbies. Because, some people get so stuck with music. It's not just about music. It's—and again, the great thing about my podcasts is I've been learning so many things just from listening to other people and some things I've already done, but other things I'm like, "Wow, that's really it's really a cool perspective to have."

The music—you have to do things that are outside of music to inspire the music making later. If you're just stuck with music, you're—you're six hours in the room, just practicing and then you have some food and then you're learning about music—it's not just about that.

TIGRAN 00:44:10: You have to be able to get out of the music world, be inspired by the nature, by kayaking, and by playing basketball, and other things, or reading a book that's not even music related, doing all these different things to inspire. So when you come back to music, you're just so energized about music that you're—you make even newer and better and more beautiful things; new projects, and you're more motivated to take on the practice or rehearsal. These people who are looking at you sometimes—not everyone does—but they're looking at your profile. They're like, "Well, this person is so well rounded, and they're doing these things and these things and they're excited about this thing in the world. They're passionate about arts education or other things."

So, online presence is very important and don't get—don't get frustrated if you have 100 followers or 1000. Just keep at it and make sure that you share with the world what you're doing. That's that's what it's about. It's—I mean, for me, especially it's not about followers or any of these other things, I just share stuff I like and I enjoy. One thing I might say—and this is an advice from me as an artist—is that you have to—whatever you do, you have to have consistency. And that's one thing that with social media presence, I haven't been very good at the consistency part. Because as musicians, to be a better harp player, you have to make sure you're consistently practicing. Whether it's once a day for half an hour or five hours, whatever. Consistency is key. You can't just say, "Oh, I didn't practice for two weeks, I'll put in—I'll put in ten hours a day for the next four days and make up for it." No, it's not about that. It's about consistency. And everything you do in life is about consistency. And that's why with social media as well, you have to be consistent. So people who are kind of paying attention to you're like, "Okay, cool. So this person posts things and we see them regularly." It's not once every 10 days, like I do sometimes. Consistency is key and everything you do so that's one of the advice I would give with—from an inexperienced social media person (*laughs*).

ANGIE 00:47:21: And have you started or gotten an interest in any new hobbies that you didn't expect—that you might get into?

TIGRAN 00:47:32: Okay, yeah, actually.

ANGIE 00:47:34: What do you do?

TIGRAN 00:47:35: Juggling,

ANGIE 00:47:36: Juggling?

TIGRAN 00:47:37: I— so—okay, I always found that fascinating. I was watching this girl. She was juggling and I was like, "Wow, this is really cool." And then I clicked and I don't even know how it came to that video—I clicked on the next thing. She's like, "I'm gonna teach you how to juggle." I was like, "Wow, this is cool." So I grabbed a couple of tennis balls I had at home and I—and I started doing it. Then I did it with three and then I saw that she has a video for four. This is the first big marketing mistake that she made. She was like—and before she started, she's like, "I have four juggling balls and I'm going to show you how it's done. But before I start, If you are not a very well-versed person with three don't do the four."

I was like, "What?" I could have watched the video and given you some—you know—she had like 100,000 people watching. It could have given her more views, I'm sure, if she didn't say that. I was like, "Okay." Click, off. I didn't want to watch the the four—the four because I was like, I can't even do three too well. But I got better at it and my son, Arshag, he loves watching me. I'm doing it to say [inaudible] _____. But I'm not very good at it. Another thing I picked up—I have a grill now, and I'm grilling some food.

ANGIE 00:48:55: Nice.

TIGRAN 00:48:57: That's something I'm not very good at and actually when my brother found that he's like, "You gotta be kidding me man. When's the last time you grilled?" I was like, "I know I didn't but I'm trying to." Yeah, so those two things that are hobbies and the other thing—over the past ten years—I played water polo when I was young.

ANGIE 00:49:18: Oh, really?

TIGRAN 00:49:19: I was very active. And I did swim. I actually—randomly, I was cleaning out some of my old boxes of stuff and I found a couple of medals that I won for swimming competitions. But for the past fifteen years or ten years or something I've been—I've been really wanting to get back into consistent exercise. Even this pandemic couldn't save me with—I'm trying to—I'm trying to be active and exercise, but it's just—it's—it's not consistent, and consistency is important. But those two—juggling and grilling. So, there it is.

ANGIE 00:49:59: I think that concludes the interview. Do you have any questions and comments?

TIGRAN 00:50:03: No, this was awesome! That's cool. So what is this going to be used for?

ANGIE 00:50:08: This is for—also I have to ask you if I have your consent to submit this interview for credit and use it for a paper.

TIGRAN 00:50:18: Of course. Yes, you have my consent.

ANGIE 00:50:20: Okay. Well, this is for my music history class, actually, and this is our last project of the quarter. It's an oral history.

TIGRAN 00:50:30: Okay, that's cool. I like that.

ANGIE 00:50:33: We have to get the stories of people, or testimonies of people who have been—people in the music world that have been impacted by COVID.

TIGRAN 00:50:44: I hope I said enough, but the—I mean, I hope I said enough about that. But the summer, like I said before, that was—that's really a big hit, I think, for a lot of musicians, because summers are not always associated with your yearly work. Sometimes an orchestra might pay you till May because they're not required to but they're like, "Okay, well, we—that was part of our season planning and we'll pay you." But then the summer, when you're working with festivals and other orchestras, they have a completely different format. They're not going to—they're not going to continue to do something or pay you for something that you weren't even involved in throughout the year. It's—it's a tough time for a lot of musicians. So hopefully I answered that. I don't know.

ANGIE 00:51:37: Yeah, it was great.